

So if somebody asks you why you came, say, because the election ought to be fought out over, what are we going to do with the good times? The answer is, we're going to take on the big challenges. And the way to do it is to keep changing, based on the philosophy that has brought us to this point. And no person in the House of Representatives, in my judgment, better embodies that than Baron Hill.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 9:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee, and his wife, Anne; Senator Evan Bayh's wife, Susan; former Representative Lee H. Hamilton; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks on Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China May 9, 2000

Thank you very much, President Ford, President Carter, Mr. Vice President, Secretary Albright, Secretary Baker, Secretary Kissinger, all the distinguished people that the Vice President acknowledged. Many of you did not stand. We have so many distinguished leaders of Congress here. I would be remiss if I didn't thank our former Speaker, Tom Foley, and our former minority leader, Bob Michel, because they helped me pass NAFTA and the WTO, and I'm grateful to both of you. Thank you. We have former House Foreign Relations Chairman Lee Hamilton, former Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Chuck Percy.

There's one person in this room I have to introduce. I wish all of you could have been sitting where we were today, and I was scanning this room, realizing that through the lives of the people in this room, the last 50 years of America has unfolded. And we're a better country because of what you have all done, and it's a better world. And it is just profoundly humbling for me to look across this sea of faces who are here. I was so glad the Vice President said what he did about it. But there's one person here I want to recognize because I'm quite sure he is the senior statesman here, and through his life, most of the 20th century unfolded, former Ambassador and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. Thank you, sir, for being here. Thank you.

You have already heard what needs to be said about this, so I'm going to try to abbreviate my remarks and focus on what is at issue here. If you look at the terms of this agreement on purely economic grounds, there's no question that Ambassador Barshefsky and Mr. Sperling

did a great job. And if the Congress declines to approve this, I will not block China going into the WTO. So what will happen? The Europeans and the Japanese will get the benefits they negotiated under the rules.

If you look at who's against this in America, it is truly ironic to look at who's against this in China. Nobody's really talked about that. Not everybody's for this in China. Who's against it in China? The people that run the state-owned industries and don't want to give up their control; the more conservative elements of the military, who would like to have greater tensions between ourselves and them, and between themselves and the people of Taiwan.

It is truly ironic, when you look at who's against this in China, to see that some of the most progressive people in the United States are basically doing what they want them to do in opposing this agreement. And for me, it is very painful. And I was very proud of the history that President Ford gave us, of the last 50 years, and very proud of what President Carter said about how we feel about labor rights and human rights and the labor movement here in this country.

But the people who are running China are not foolish people. They are highly intelligent. They know the decision they have made. They understand that they are unleashing forces of change which cannot be totally controlled in the system, which, as President Carter says, has dominated in China over the last 21 years since we normalized relations.

Two years ago there were only 2 million Internet users in China. Last year there were

9 million. This year there will be over 20 million. At some point, there will be a critical mass reached, and when that happens, there will be a sea change.

When Martin Lee was here the other day talking to people about this, he said, "You know, I've led the democracy movement in Hong Kong for decades. I've never met Zhu Rongji. I can't even go to China. They won't let me go. But I'll tell you this: If you vote against this, the United States will have no influence on the human rights policies of the Chinese Government."

So why are we having this debate? Because people are anxiety-ridden about the forces of globalization, or they're frustrated over the human rights record of China, or they don't like all the procedures of the WTO. There are lots of things. Every one of you gets up every morning, there's something you don't like. That doesn't mean you should be against this agreement. But that's what has—this agreement has become like flypaper for the accumulated frustrations people have about things in the world that they don't like very much or that are spinning beyond their control or that they feel will have an uncertain result. And that's the world we're living in.

But I will say this: You know, people ask me all the time, now that I've completed about over 90 percent of my term, "Well, what have you learned about this, that, or the other thing? What have you learned about foreign policy?" I've learned it's a lot more like real life than I thought it was when I showed up here. I read all Dr. Kissinger's books, and I was immensely enlightened by them. But what he said today is right. Normally, unless you have to fight with somebody, you do better with an outstretched hand than with a clenched fist. You want to have a strong defense. You want to be ready for the worst, but you've got to try to plan for the best and give people a chance to do the right thing.

President Carter was talking about those 900,000 village elections. I went to some of those villages, and I met with some of those elected leaders. I think it would be a pretty good idea if they ran all of our campaign speeches back when we ran for reelection. [Laughter] Of course, I can say that since I'm not running anymore. [Laughter]

But I just have to say, this is an enormously impressive meeting. But the vote is going to

take place at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, and it's by far the most important national security vote that will be cast this year. It's an American vote. It unites Henry Kissinger and Andy Young and Jesse Ventura—and not at a wrestling match. [Laughter]

I thank you for being here, sir. You didn't have to come today, and I really appreciate it.

But I will say this: We have got to tell people. You know, it doesn't matter what the local political pressure is, and it doesn't matter what your anxiety is. The truth is, if we vote for this, 10 years from now we will wonder why it was a hard fight. And if the Congress votes against it, they will be kicking themselves in the rear 10 years from now, because America will be paying the price. And I believe the price will start to be paid not 10 years from now, not even 10 months from now, but immediately. That's why the President-elect of Taiwan wants us so badly to approve permanent normal trading relations. That's why most of the human rights activists do.

And yes, it's an economic issue, and you all know I'm interested in economics. And it's about as much of an economic laydown as I've ever seen, because what we're giving is China membership in the WTO in return for greater access to their markets, the right to sell things there without having to manufacture things there, the right to sell things there without having a transfer of technology.

It will help us, because then we'll at least have some demonstration of our good-faith commitment to the long-term decision they have made to try to be a more open society abiding by international rules of law. Then we'll at least have a way to continue this dialog and intensify it on religious rights, on political rights, on labor rights, on all human rights issues, on the environment, on missile and other technology proliferation, all these defense issues which have brought the former Chiefs of Staff and the former Defense Secretaries here and the former National Security Advisers here today.

So what I would like to ask all of you to do when you leave here is to pick somebody you know in the Congress and call them and tell them what we're all saying to one another today. Of course we want the voice of this meeting to echo across the country and to embrace the Congress.

I wish it weren't a fight, but it is. And I'd just like to say one thing in closing. If you

look at the whole sweep of American history, at critical periods, we've always been willing to redefine our responsibilities as a nation: first, in ways that brought us together as a people, in the 19th century and then all the way through the Great Depression and later through the civil rights revolution and the women's rights movement and the environmental movement; and second, in ways that recognized our unique responsibilities first to our neighbors and then to those across the globe as we became more and more blessed.

One of the things I was thinking about in terms of our relationship with China is that President Nixon and President Carter and President Ford and even President Bush, for whose support we're very grateful for, they all faced a different world than we face here today. And frankly, they faced different challenges at home when they were making these tough decisions abroad.

We haven't been in this kind of economic and social shape in America since the early 1960's. If we can't do this now, when in the wide world will we ever be able to do it? Why—what could we possibly be afraid of, based on the capacity of this country to grow its economy and improve its social condition? If we can't meet this kind of a challenge now, we are abandoning the legacy of the last 50 years, when previous Presidents and previous Congresses have done things harder to do than this in economic and social turbulence far greater than we face today.

In fact, I almost think that these good times are some sort of a disability here because they encourage people to lose their focus, to lose their concentration, to sort of drift off and assume that there are no consequences to decisions that are not responsible. There are always consequences.

And this country has never had a better chance to shape the world of the future for our children. We all know it's the right decision. And virtually 100 percent of the people at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue know it's the right decision. We cannot allow our prosperity to lull us into self-indulgence.

We have to use our prosperity to build the 21st century world that many of you fought in World War II for, Senator Mansfield fought in World War I for, that you served in the Government for, that you gave your lives to public service for, that you sustained our standard for freedom throughout the cold war for, that you supported all these other trade-opening measures for.

And if we can't do it with the lowest unemployment in 30 years and 21 million new jobs and the longest expansion in history, we'll never be able to explain it to our children and our grandchildren, and this place will not be nearly as happy a place to be for the next several years. But if we do it, one more time we will say, we kept faith in our time with America's eternal march.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Hong Kong Democratic Party Chair Martin Lee; Prime Minister Zhu Rongji of China; former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young; Gov. Jesse Ventura of Minnesota; President-elect Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan; and former Senator Michael J. Mansfield. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and James A. Baker III, former Presidents Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter, and Vice President Al Gore.

Statement on Protection of Forest Roadless Areas

May 9, 2000

The plan proposed today by Secretary Glickman to prohibit road building in roadless areas of our national forests is an important step toward my goal of lasting protection for these priceless lands. These pristine areas are some

of the last wild places in America, and I am firmly committed to preserving them for future generations. I commend the Forest Service for its extraordinary effort in developing this proposal and providing the American people with